

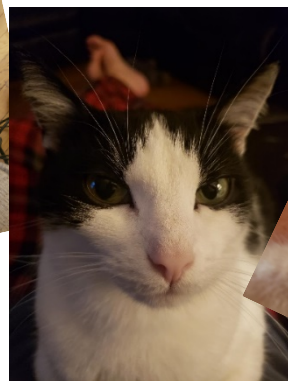
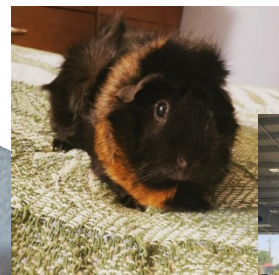
Suicide In The Veterinary Profession: Prevention and Postvention

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About Me

- I am not a mental health professional
- 25+ years experience in the veterinary profession
 - 11 years with MedVet
 - Certified Compassion Fatigue Professional (CCFP)
 - QPR Gatekeeper
 - QPR Online Counseling and Suicide Intervention Specialist (OCSIS)
- I have too many pets



Suicide: Let's Talk About It

- Suicide is a GLOBAL epidemic
 - 1 million people worldwide die by suicide each year
 - 47,500 deaths by suicide in the US (2019)
 - 1.4 million attempted suicide in the US (2019)
- Studies have identified a link between suicide and occupation
- Veterinary medicine rate of suicide:
 - 3X more than the general population

Professional Risk Factors

- Personality
- Professional Isolation
- Work-related stressors
- Exposure to death
- Other mental illness/Outside Stressors
- Compassion Fatigue
- Access to and knowledge of means



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Suicide Prevention: What can you do?

- Be kind
- Take care of yourself
- Ask if your coworkers are ok
- Learn and Use QPR
- Have a plan



Pause to PAWS
practice mindfulness
Assess self-care
Work together
Say something



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What is QPR?

Ask a Question, Save a Life!

You can become a QPR Gatekeeper.

QPR=

- 1 Question 2 Persuade 3 Refer**

3 simple steps that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide!



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What is QPR?

QPR is not:

- A substitute for formal mental health examination and/or diagnosis
- A treatment plan

QPR is:

- A tool to help determine the current level of immediate suicide risk
- A strategic intervention designed to help reduce immediate risk of suicide through empathetic communication and referral to a mental health professional



What we know

- The risk of suicide increases when several health factors and life stressors converge at the same time in a person's life
- Depression and other mental health problems are the leading risk factors for suicide; depression is among the most treatable of all mood disorders; more than three-fourths of people with depression respond positively to treatment
- 90% of those who commit suicide had underlying mental illness



What we know

- There is no simple “checklist” to detect if someone is suicidal
- Even among licensed professionals there is a serious lack of systematic training in how to detect suicide
- Of those who commit suicide*:
 - 25% contact a mental health provider one month prior to death
- The best way to prevent suicide is through early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health conditions



What do we do?

90% of those who commit suicide had underlying mental illness

According to the CDC, mental health includes

- Emotional
- Psychological and
- Social wellbeing

Our mental health also determines

- How we handle stress
- Relate to others and
- Make healthy choices



.....Support a Culture of Wellbeing

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Supporting a Culture of Wellbeing



Supporting a Culture of Wellbeing

•Positive reinforcement of healthy boundaries

Emotional



•Create a work environment that is as clean, open, and light as possible

Environmental



•Offer financial assistance for continuing education and other development

Financial



•Create "Fun Facts" flyers that rotate weekly or monthly

Intellectual



•Schedule and uphold regular performance reviews

Occupational



•Support team members who adjust their exercise or to schedule a medical appt.

Physical



•When eating lunch with members of the team, refrain from talking "shop" and encourage everyone to share fun facts about themselves

Social



•Share daily gratitudes as a group at the start or end of each workday, or both!

Spiritual



•Hold an art show or establish a rotating exhibit of employee-created artwork

Creative



Sample Action Plan

- Enlist leaders
- Launch a wellbeing committee
- Define wellbeing
- Create a wellbeing policy
- Conduct a needs assessment
- Identify priorities
- Identify areas with needed education
- Create and execute an implementation and program plan
- Continually measure, evaluate, and improve



Education and Development

- Detecting warning signs of mental health and suicidal thoughts
- Facilitate, destigmatize, and encourage help-seeking behaviors
- Carefully implement programs that encourage help-seeking
- Begin a dialogue about suicide prevention
- Elevate the focus on self-care



Postvention: Managing Tragedy



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Postvention: Managing Tragedy

Postvention is

- Psychological first aid
- Crisis intervention
- and other support offered after a suicide to affected individuals

Postvention: A Leaders Role

Leaders play a critical role in setting the tone for how the rest of the workplace will respond to a suicide

- Identify necessary workplace adjustments (time off, lightened duties, funeral attendance, etc.)
- Be visible and check in with employees.
- Find the right balance between commemorating the deceased, but not memorializing the death
- Role model healthy grieving
- PROMOTE help-seeking behaviors!

Postvention: A Leaders Role

Quick Tips:

- Treat all employee deaths the same
- Communicate quickly but accurately
- Dispel rumors and be aware of suicide contagion
- Support and Promote Healthy Grieving
- **Goal:** Establish Workplace Equilibrium

Postvention: Immediate (Days 1-4)

Get the Facts

- Confirm the news is true
 - Speculation and rumors can exasperate an already intense situation
 - Time is of the essence

Implement Your Suicide Crisis Response

The purpose of a coordinated crisis response is to effectively manage the situation, provide opportunities for grief support, maintain an environment focused on essential workday activities to the extent possible, help team members cope with their feelings, and minimize the risk of suicide contagion

Step 1: Contact the decedent's family.

- Offer condolences,,
- Ask if the family may know of any staff who were particularly close to the deceased
- Discuss the family's preference for disclosing the death was by suicide (confirm factual)
- Inquire about funeral arrangements

Step 2: Communicate with the team

Step 3: Share Resources and Information.

Step 4: Consider Adding Additional Support

Postvention: Immediate (Days 1-4)

Communicating with the team

- Ideally do in-person to allow staff an opportunity to express their own reactions and grief, and to identify anyone who may need additional support.
 - For larger workplaces, staff may be notified in smaller groups, when possible.
- It is critically important that the information shared about the death is accurate, factual, and honors the family's requests, including any request for privacy.
- Follow safe messaging guidelines
 - Avoid simplifying, glamorizing, or romanticizing the person or their death.
- Explain plans for the day, and highlight additional resources and support, if available.

Postvention: Immediate (Days 1-4)

Tips for Communicating

- Give accurate information about suicide
- Do not focus on the method of suicide or provide graphic details
- Do not glorify the act of suicide
- Promote help-seeking
- Address blaming and scapegoating
- Address feelings

Postvention: Short-Term (Weeks 1-4)

Mental and Behavioral Health Services

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Loss and Healing Support

- On-site grief debriefing (EAP) or crisis center
- Local bereavement support groups

Crisis Resources

- Post local crisis hotline numbers and resources.
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline

Self-Care Strategies

- Support time away to grieve
- Mindfulness apps (Headspace)
- Group “walking breaks”
- Provide healthy snacks and meals

Postvention: Long-term

Memorialization

- Create a work-based community service program in honor of the deceased;
- Put together a team to participate in an awareness or fund-raising event sponsored by one of the national mental health or suicide prevention organizations
- Raise funds to help the family defray their funeral expenses;
- Make a book or notecards available for several weeks, in which staff and clients can write messages to the family, share memories of the deceased, or offer condolences, that can then be presented to the family on behalf of the workplace community

The anniversary of the death

- Anticipate these dates
- Provide team members an opportunity to acknowledge the date and deceased
- Check-in on those who were particularly close with the deceased and remind of resources available

Postvention: Long-term

Suicide Prevention and Awareness

- Consider implementing a comprehensive suicide prevention program and mental wellbeing program, if you do not already have one.
- Develop or review policies and procedures for dealing with all deaths, including deaths by suicide

Some experts suggest waiting several months before providing prevention education to team members following the death of a coworker

- For some, more immediate access to training resources can be helpful in their healing journey.

Consider having a training resource that team members can access if they choose, in the time frame that is most appropriate for them

- This should be optional within the first several months following the death of a coworker

Recap

- Care for yourself
- Support a Culture of Wellbeing
- Postvention: Have a plan

Resources

Mental and Behavioral Health Resources

- National behavioral health treatment services locator: findtreatment.samhsa.gov
- Call the 24/7 National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for treatment referral and information
- Visit mhanational.org/finding-help to find mental health resources and support services
- Contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other employee mental health to learn more about assistance they can provide for crisis response.
- Identify local grief and trauma-informed counselors in your area.
- Visit afsp.org/resources

Crisis Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
 - suicidepreventionlifeline.org
 - 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for free and confidential support 24/7
- Crisis Text Line
 - crisistextline.org
 - Text "TALK" to 741-741 for free and confidential support 24/7.
- Find out if your community has a mobile crisis unit. Know the contact information for your local emergency department, psychiatric hospital, or walk-in clinic.

Resources

Suicide Prevention Information

- Suicide Risk Factors and Warning Signs: afsp.org/signs
- Fact Sheet, Facts about Mental Health and Suicide Among Veterinarians: afsp.org/veterinarianfacts

Loss and Healing Resources

- After a Suicide Loss: afsp.org/afteraloss
- Find a support group: afsp.org/findasupportgroup

Resources to Support Veterinary Wellbeing

- avma.org/wellbeing: Includes access to QPR suicide prevention training-free to AVMA members
- myvetlife.avma.org
- navta.net/wellbeing
- ASKAssessSupportKnow.com: Developed by Banfield Pet Hospital® "ASK" (Assess, Support, Know) is the first of its kind training designed specifically to help veterinary professionals recognize and address emotional distress and suicidal thoughts in themselves and others. The ASK training is available as a free resource for the entire veterinary profession.

Questions?

References

A Managers Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace; 10 Action Steps for dealing with Suicide

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

QPR Institute: QPR Suicide Prevention Training Courses - Online Counseling and Suicide Intervention Specialist

AVMA Post Suicide Guide: A Guide For Veterinary Workplaces



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